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 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

North Babil USACE projects register significant gains

By John Connor
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Two key projects in Iraq 's North Babil province--the rehabilitation of a vocational-technical school and the construction of a maternity hospital--are registering significant gains.

The second phase of a three-pronged effort at the Iskandariyah Vo-Tech was just completed and an important third phase, to include refurbishing dormitories, will start soon, said Lt. Col. Gregory McMahan, head of the Forat Area Office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Vo-Tech project is a top priority of Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, commander of the Third Infantry Division, who views the project as critical because it provides job skills and expands options for young people in the area. The project is being funded with 3rd ID CERP (Commander's Emergency Response Program) funds and is being managed by USACE.

Col. Steve Hill, commander of USACE's Gulf Region South district, recently inspected the Vo-Tech school with McMahan. He said it was "a great day because we were able to see active use of a project created by a number of partners, the 3rd ID, USACE, the headmaster, and a number of local officials."

The headmaster, Mr. Nassir, has been with the school for 10 years. He voiced his appreciation of all the work being managed there by USACE, saying he and his faculty are very pleased to have such a quality and well-furnished facility in which to teach.



Construction is progressing on a maternity and pediatric hospital in Mussayyib. (USACE photo)

The newly-completed phase entailed refurbishing the floors and electrical service in several shop classrooms to provide suitable conditions for the installation of new precision milling, turning and grinding equipment.

The larger initial phase, completed in December 2007, featured the installation of power generation, potable water and sewer facilities, and the refurbishment of a dining facility. The combined cost of the first two phases was more than \$700,000.

Bids are now being filed for the next phase--the refurbishment of seven dormitories, an additional classroom building and an auditorium. This phase is estimated to cost about \$5 million and will provide accommodations and additional training capacity for more than 1,000 students from outside the North Babil area.

The Vo-Tech job is one of a number of similar projects being done around Iraq but it has particularly high visibility because of the number of students being served currently and prospectively.

At present, nearly 1,500 students are attending classes there on subjects including computer repair and operation, sewing, hair styling, welding, carpentry, residential electrician and auto mechanics. Future classes will include machine shop operations and heavy equipment operation and repair.

Currently, 38 percent of students are female, attending the computer and hair-dresser classes, McMahan said. He said the students are friendly, well-mannered, well-dressed and appear to be fully engaged in their classes.

The dorm work is expected to expand the geographic reach of those who can attend and bring the number of students to more than 2,000, said Hill.

Maj. Gen. Lynch said he looks forward to visiting the school during his next tour to see how far it has progressed.

Also hitting its stride after a start slowed by a now-resolved land dispute is construction of a maternity and pediatrics hospital in Mussayyib. The contract for the job is nearly \$5 million. Winbourne ("Mac") Drake, serving as a construction representative with GRS, voiced confidence that the job will continue to progress satisfactorily due to the close cooperation between the contractor and his local office.

This project will provide a 50-bed hospital, including a surgery wing, outpatient care, a premature infant nursery, and other maternity and pediatric care. The new hospital will replace a deteriorating hospital in the same city. McMahan said the work is of high quality, with special care being taken to provide an immaculate, attractive complex.

Construction is now about 40 percent completed. The hospital is projected to be finished in early October 2008.

"The hospital is progressing exceptionally well and shows visual signs of quality and price on the part of management and labor," said Hill, who inspected the facility recently with McMahan.

Hill also said this project shows the clear benefits offered by an Iraqi engineer workforce that is particularly well-organized and capable in the northern portion of the area served by GRS. GRS does reconstruction work in the nine southern provinces of Iraq.

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